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CONVENTION PROGRAM 2015

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Q&A WITH TSR/GYGAX MAGAZINE

Micah Holmes interviews Jayson Elliot at TSR about Gygax Magazine for AetherCon IV

MH: Growing up with Dragon Magazine™/Dungeon Magazine™ I personally gained many beneficial lessons as a budding GM. Do you plan to publish content in a similar vein?

JE: Yes. We've had some great articles on game mastering, and how to be a good player as well. For example, Tim Kask kicked things off in issue #1 talking about what keeps him behind the screen after all these years. Dennis Sustare had a great article about keeping magic magical in your campaign. Michael Shea had the great "Zen and the art of game mastery" in issue 5. Jess Hartley did her two-part series on game mastering in 2 and 3. And that's not even touching on Len Lakofka's column in each issue, "Leomund's Secure Shelter." Some people may know that I was the co-founder of Roll for Initiative, the 1st Edition AD&D podcast. If they heard me on the show, they've probably heard me talk about some of my own approaches to being a game master, although, of course, I only talked about it in the context of AD&D on that show. I'd like to have time to write some of that in Gygax Magazine.

MH: Considering your previous experience publishing genre-specific magazines do you believe you detect "The Next Big Thing" on the horizon for Role-Play Gaming?

JE: We're certainly in the middle of a board game renaissance. In

fact, I'd call it a new dawn. There are board game cafés popping up all over the country, articles being written about the rise of tabletop gaming, and board games have consistently been the number one category on Kickstarter. It's clear that crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter have been a big part of the phenomenon. Now, how does that relate to analog RPGs? It's not one-for one. Even going into a board game café, I get a little bit of nerdshame asking if it's okay for us to bring our role-playing group down. But it passes quickly. The next big thing is going to show up in high schools and colleges, and some of it may already be happening. I've got my own thoughts about what it will be, but some of that is wrapped up in what we're working on for the future, so I think I'll just keep it to myself for a little bit longer.

MH: Besides the magazine are there any new projects planned for TSRGames.com?

JE: Absolutely. We just launched our podcast network — the TSR Podcast Network (www.TSRPN.com). There are two shows so far, and each one has about six episodes released. Cube of Death is a cross between a dungeon crawl and a quiz show, where contestants have to answer nerdy trivia questions to survive, while collecting weapons and loot to try and take out their adversaries. On our other show, Game School, we bring a different RPG designer on each episode to teach you how to play their game, with a actual play session, including character creation, so you can experience

**Jayson Elliot
Interview by
Micah Holmes**

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it directly. Our first standalone adventure will be out soon—it's a three-part series by Luke Gygax, the BL series (the Blighted Lands), written for 5th Edition D&D. The first one, BL1, is the Search for Belwah's Temple. Frank Mentzer and James Carpio are also working on a 5E module, and for next year, we've got a complete new game system that's been in development for some time. It's not a fantasy RPG, but that's kind of all I want to say until it's time to take the wraps off it. The other two projects in the works are an analog gaming blog called The Multiverse, and an iPhone app that I've been developing for board gamers.

MH: As founder of the “new” TSR do you expect to expand further into products for gaming such as dice, featured modules, box sets, et. al.?

JE: We're not the same company as the original TSR, although of course there are a lot of people from the original TSR involved, such as Luke & Ernie Gygax, Tim Kask, Margaret Weis, Merle Rasmussen, Allen Hammack, Len Lakofka, and others. We registered the trademark in 2011, after finding that it was abandoned, and chose to use the name as a way of remembering what we loved about gaming—but we've got a new logo, and we're a completely new company. Once we've got a few of our own stand alone products out in the market, other than the magazine, I'd definitely like to have some fun accessories. For now, I think we need to have enough core products to make someone actually want to have our logo on other things.

MH: Will Gygax Magazine find its way onto mass-market shelves or does the TSR crew plan to keep it simplified to internet access and mail subscriptions?

JE: I think that for the moment, we'll keep selling the magazine directly, and through local game stores. There are very few mass-market outlets left for any kind of print products. The only two that spring to mind are Barnes & Noble and Books, Inc. Maybe someday Walmart and Target will come knocking on our door asking to sell Gygax Magazine, but I don't think that's something we're going to hold our breath for.

MH: Not to blatantly incite an edition-war among our readers, but are you fond of a particular edition of D&D or setting?

JE: I grew up with Mentzer Basic and 1st Edition AD&D, so that's my comfort zone. If I were only allowed to play one RPG, then that's what I'd play. I've played every version of D&D, though. I'm really happy about 5th Edition, I think Wizards nailed it with

the new game. Ultimately, the best version of D&D is the one you have the most fun with. There's no “right” answer. When the topic of edition wars comes up online, I always have the same answer. I just link to John Kovalic's installment of Dork Tower called “Edition Bores” <http://www.dorktower.com/2014/01/29/edition-bores-dork-tower-29-01-14/>

MH: Do you have a particular moment of satisfaction with your influence on the Role-Playing community?

JE: Honestly, I'm just happy that I get to be involved, and I love seeing all my gamer friends at conventions and online. My biggest satisfaction is just being part of the tribe.

MH: Do you have advice for those looking to submit material to TSR or any other publisher?

JE: Just go for it! Our submission guidelines are on the website for Gygax Magazine - <http://gygaxmagazine.com/submission-guidelines/> Right now, we're really on the hunt for great adventure writers for all systems. This will be not just for Gygax Magazine, but also for an idea I've got for TSR, overall. If you want to write for the magazine, have a look at what we've published before, but don't feel like you have to limit yourself. If you're not sure, just drop us a line at submissions@gygaxmagazine.com and describe what you're thinking of. Keep it interesting, fun, and useful. We're doing the stuff we're doing because we love it. My first test for whether something's a good idea is, did I make this because I wanted it for myself? If you're excited about it, that's the first step.

Micah Holmes is a published author and illustrator. He wrote the fantastic “Tyme And Yon Serpent (Serpent’s Tail Book 1)” & is working his magic on the upcoming gem “Once Upon Tun’Rumma”.

He is a full time loving husband and father and spends the rest of his time working on his book or at his dayjob as Quality Control Inspector.

Links:

<http://www.amazon.com/Tyme-Serpent-Serpents-Tail-Book-ebook/dp/B004FPZ0BU>

The image shows the cover of a book titled "T.A.Y.S. ACT 1; BOOK 2" in red serif font. Below it is the title "ONCE UPON TUN'RUMMAL" in a larger white serif font. Underneath that is the text "NOW AVAILABLE!!!" in a large red serif font. At the bottom, there is a URL "WWW.LULU.COM/SPOTLIGHT/GCALPHA911ATJUNODOTCOM". To the left of the text is a portrait of a man with a shaved head and a beard. To the right is a stylized illustration of a cross-like shape with a central eye and a red heart.

Q&A WITH TIN HAT GAMES

Shannon McNamara interviews Tin Hat Games for AetherCon IV

Matteo "Matt" Botti, Alessandro "Alex" Rivaroli and Manuel Strali are formal members of Tin Hat Games, a group of creators of games founded in 2012. After the first edition of #UrbanHeroes, presented in Lucca Comics and Games 2012, they started a Kickstarter project in 2014. It was a very stressful period but it gave them the opportunity to meet new interesting friends and collaborators and now we're ready to show everyone our final product in its international version.

McN: First off I'd like to let everyone know that Alex and Matt are Italian and not speaking in their native tongue yet they're pretty good English speakers. Kudos!

THG: Thanks! We're just trying to speak normally, without hand gesture, capisc?! Hello everyone! And yes, the final version of #UrbanHeroes was translated by a professional translator and edited by a native speaker game designer.

McN: I'm always curious how people who end up designing tabletop games got into tabletop gaming so what's your story?

THG: Speaking about #UrbanHeroes the story of the product is very long: Alex created the concept in 1990. Alex always loved the comics world and decided to create "something similar to D&D but with badass superheroes!". After years and years of gaming and testing Alex met Matt and, with a bunch of other fantastic

**Tin Hat Games
Interview by
Shannon McNamara**

people, they wrote setting and rules for a live action roleplaying games based on the World of Darkness. After that Alex decided to give his idea a chance and with Matt they decided to "do something" for it. This was the beginning of the Tin Hat Games.

McN: You have some interesting products as well as some future ones in the works.

THG: Thank you. From 2012 to today we worked tirelessly on #UrbanHeroes and its expansion (an adventure module, an expansion of setting and rules and a Scriptwriter' Screen) but we want more and we wish to present to international audience a simple and funny narrative game, a board game about the classic roleplaying games era and, last but not least, a more complex and ambitious board game set in space.

McN: Now with Urban Heroes you had a successful Kickstarter and as I understand it you have another Kickstarter coming soon. Tell us about that. Also, what languages will be it be?

THG: Now that Kickstarter is available in Italy we saw a lot of Italian products trying to reach their goal, Tin Hat Games always wanted to make the difference with ultra detailed games so we can guarantee that every future products will be in Italian AND English, hoping to find new fans, friends, geeks and nerds to play with.



McN: What is it about the game which makes it unique and worth checking out for curious gamers?

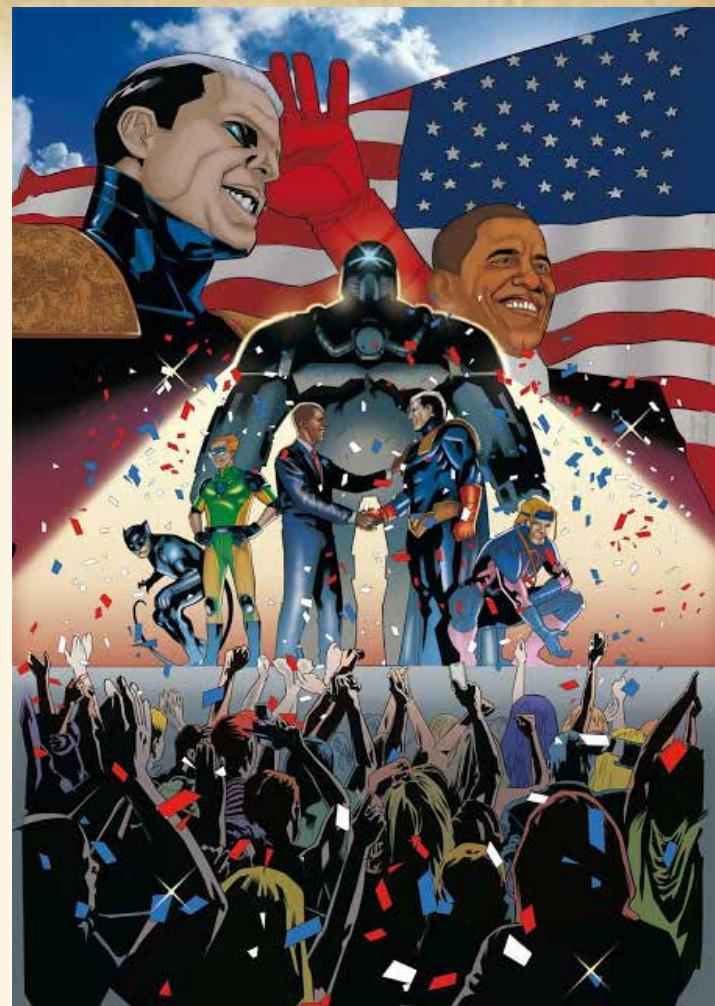
THG: #UrbanHeroes is about here and now so you can play your H.E.R.O. in a superpunk world, that means a realistic world, that isn't going to give you a second chance, where, even if you're a super, you must keep your eyes open and you must, in every circumstance, never underestimate your opponents.

McN: For people who don't want to be like comic book heroes but still have some powers it sounds like you have a "gritty" superhero setting. Is this true and could you elaborate for those who don't want to be like Superman yet more like Batman or Green Arrow?

THG: Yes, you can call #UrbanHeroes, as we said before, superpunk or gritty. Please remember that every H.E.R.O.es involved are basically "normal" humans with something that don't belongs to human race, something that is very difficult to use and manipulate, something that comes from elsewhere, that can drive you mad. Even the Divine H.E.R.O.es (the one convinced to be real gods / avatar / personification of ideas or concept) are very dangerous human but, at the end of the day, under their Powers, Power Up and Flaws they're just humans. Speaking about Batman and Green Arrow ("normal" human that has one of the most important powers of all the time: super money) yes, it's possible to reproduce their style of combat of their superhero stereotype with a lot of gadget, maneuver and a tactical style of combat.

McN: In closing here's a question I always like to ask. What is it about tabletop RPGs that made you passionate enough to keep creating scenarios and products for it as well as continuing to play in the venue when there are other options?

THG: We are three different creators and writers with three different ways of thinking and different passion but, now we're in our 30's (Manuel is recently leveled up to 40) so we love games that are not so easy. Let me explain, we love to play but there's one thing that we love more: create stories with a deep pathos, something that is going to make you think about it during the day after, or study a specific historic period or even see in different ways the era that we're leaving today. That's why we always underline the importance in #UrbanHeroes of the news that we're living and seeing on TV plus a large use of commons sense and pragmatism. Speaking of drugs, violence, abuse, showbiz's extreme life doesn't mean that we love these topics but that we want to focus on the real world, with the good and the bad of our time, without ignore the worst part of it. Speaking about the game that we love and that we still play, we can list: Call of Cthulhu, Vampire, Cyberpunk, Mage, Kult and other Italian games.



Storyteller Shannon MacNamara is your everyman. He can be a writer, a gamer, a designer, or an artist. He's making the rounds, attending and exploring Gaming Conventions. Shannon writes a review about his Con escapades, tales about his gaming adventures, and whatnots on his StoryTellers blog.

Links:

<http://storytellersjem.blogspot.com/>

The Gaming Life, playas ;)

by
Storyteller
Shannon Mac

VENDORS HALL





Q&A WITH McNABB GAMES

Randall Newnham of Growing up Gamers interviews John McNabb of McNabb Games for AetherCon IV

RN: How long have you been a gamer, and what kinds of games do you like?

McN: I have been playing Tabletop Role Playing Games Since around 2000 and have played many different genres and systems. Right now My favorite games are of course our own Morgalad Fantasy RPG, and I also play in a few home games of AD&D, Hunter the Reckoning, and Cyberpunk with my local gaming group. I prefer games that have a bit of a tie in to something that I enjoy in reality and then takes it and expands upon it. For instance I really enjoy Supernatural Lore and theology so Hunter The Reckoning is a great bit of fun as it dabbles slightly in that realm, also I have my degree in computer programming so cyberpunk is always a good bit of fun because it allows me and my friends to sit around creating data maps and attempting to break each others security protocols.

RN: What drove you to start your own game company, and what have you learned from doing so?

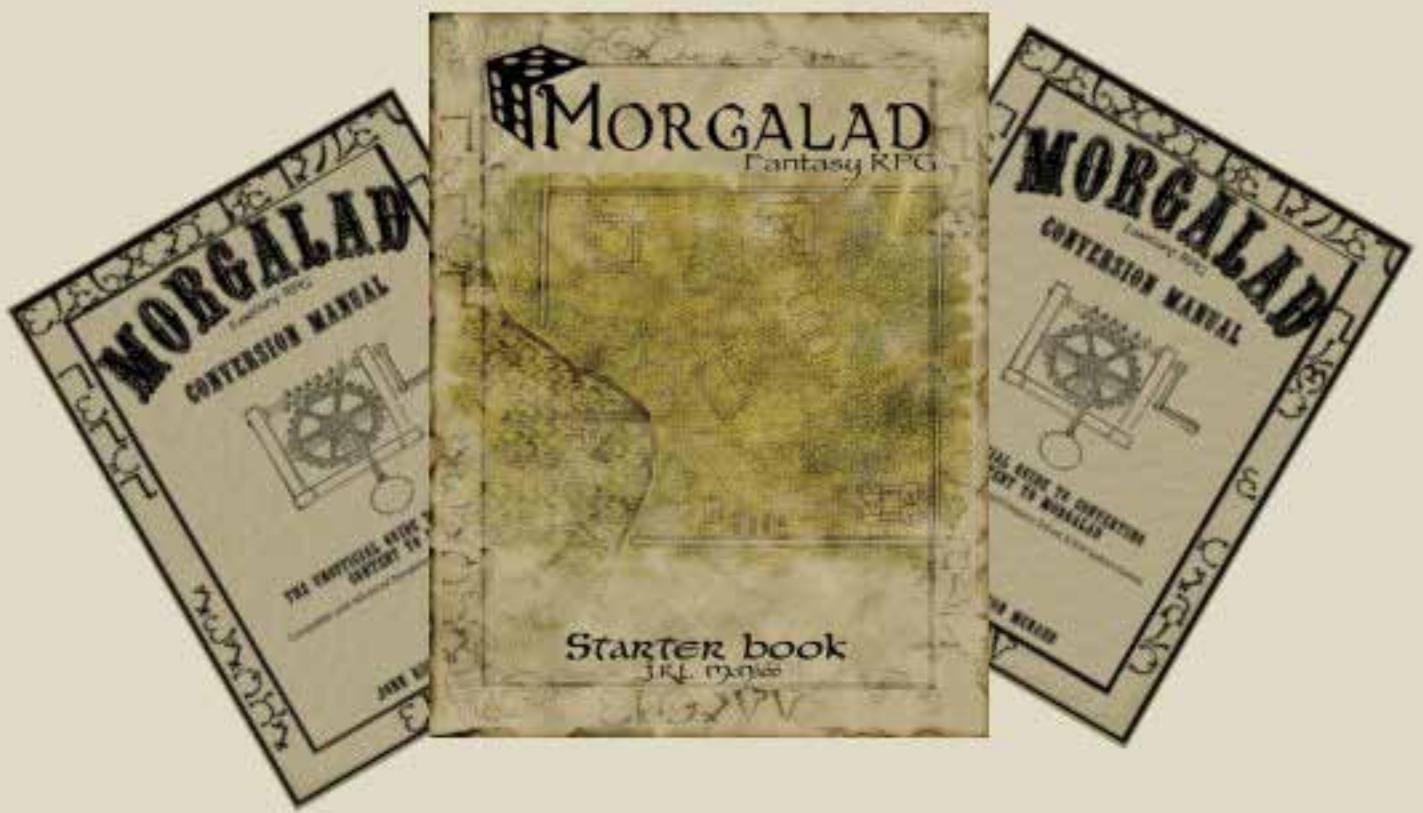
McN: Well I have been writing and developing content for roughly 15 years now but never took the leap into publishing it until last year. I had a large group of supporters asking, and pretty much demanding, that I publish it so that they can get a copy to share with

**John McNabb
Interview by
Randall Newnham**

their local groups. I kept trying to find a fantasy based TRPG that was super cheap to buy into, easily understood, and simple enough to keep rules lawyers in check, but expandable enough to allow players the customization that is truly enjoyable. I wanted to make games that would be affordable, fun to play, easy to understand, and capable of withstanding the test of time, without having to create new editions every 5 years or so like so many systems are prone to. I learned a lot through this process. Such as investors are a great way to get started but in the long run that's inevitably what causes companies to turn their backs on their communities for the sake of profit and mistakes like that can't be made. We went the route of crowdsourcing to ensure that there was enough interest in what we had, and sure enough we had a great group of supporters show up and allowed us to finally take those steps to becoming a full-fledged gaming publisher.

RN: Tell me about the Morgalad Fantasy RPG. What makes it unique? What does it do that other systems do not?

McN: Morgalad is a tabletop role playing game set in a pre-medieval era in a world of high fantasy. It offers an alternative approach to the fantasy setting. With a new unique combat and magick system, Morgalad offers the old school high fantasy charm with a more narrative flair. Mechanically, Morgalad uses a dice pool system comprised of 4D6, based upon a characters abilities, level,



and attributes. Character points are obtained as your character progresses and these points are utilized to grant you extra modifiers, or even additional dice in certain pools. Armor in this setting does not just make you harder to hit armor can also be used to absorb a percentage of the damage that would otherwise be inflicted upon your character during combat. Your character is built by choosing a base species and applying a professional template upon it. With over 100+ species in the creature compendium, and 50+ abilities available to each profession, each player has the ability to customize their character to be unlike any other. This game is meant to offer the fans of this genre an open ended alternative with no level caps and endless customization; there will be no new editions so the fans don't have to worry about backing and supporting a product just to be thrown under the bus every few years. Every year a new expansion will be released encompassing new levels, abilities, species, professions, and new optional mechanics.

RN: What is in the future for McNabb Games?

McN: We currently have an expansion slated every year for our Morgalad Series, which will have new adventures and loads of additional content. The current story follows the natural progression of this world as a bronze age, an iron age, a silver age, and a golden age. this cycle repeats so while I don't see a Morgalad 2 happening The updates will span 4 differing genres 1 for each age. so you can find one age and setting you like playing and keep with it. For example a bronze age would be a dark age of no technology and low magic, very gritty. an iron age is what most fantasy games are set in. a silver age would be roughly previctorian era Steam-punkish, and the golden age would incorporate futuristic gaming. Also time progresses and ages rise and fall. For instance, an advanced society could exist in a futuristic golden age but overtime they annihilate themselves and start over in a dark age bronze age setting having to relearn everything. The ages continuously progress in that order over and over again. So while the core rulebook covers the bronze and iron age, the silver and golden ages will be optional supplements to be released later. We also have two new collectible card games slated to come out in 2016. We are working alongside new writers and artists to not only flesh out the legends of the First Ages of Morgalad, we are also working on completely unique campaign settings that encompass entire new worlds that can be used for Morgalad or can easily be transferred over to another game utilizing the unofficial conversion manuals we have available at drivethrpg. We hope to develop more each year and prove that a company that puts its community first can compete against some of the larger well known establishments.

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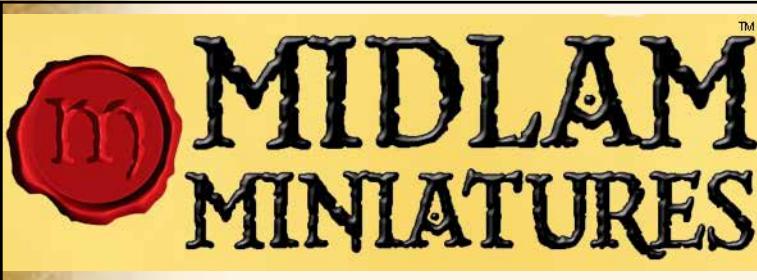
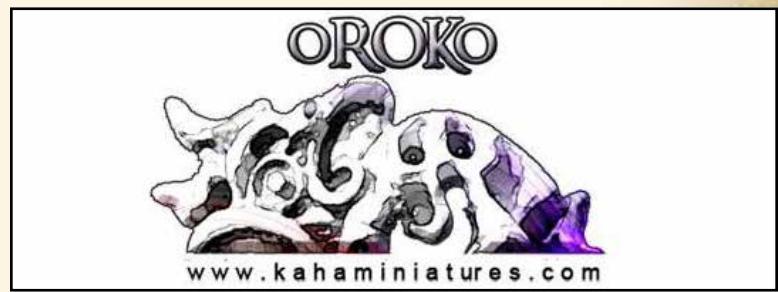
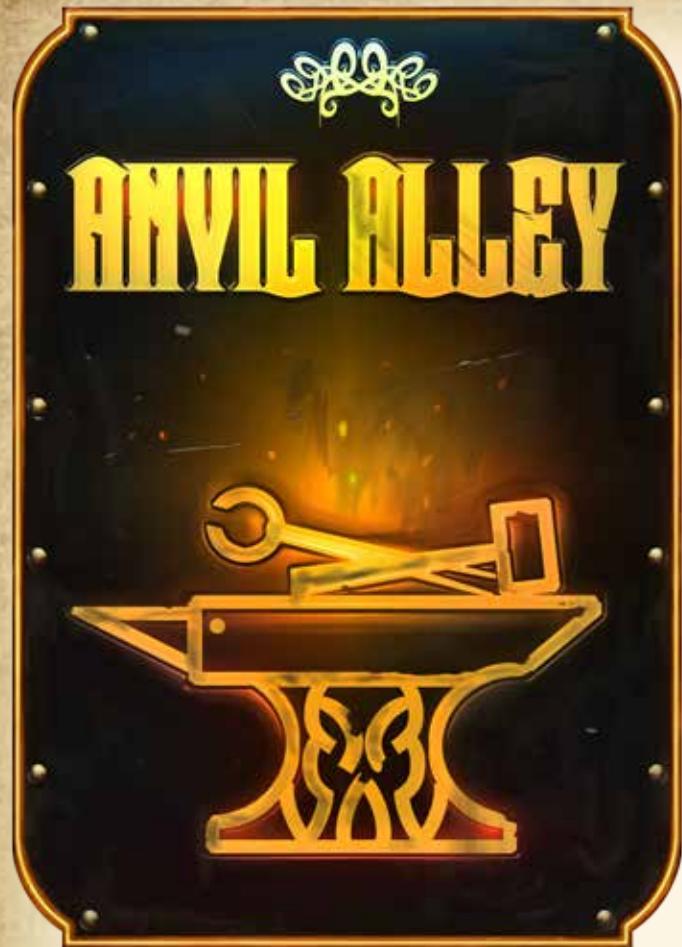
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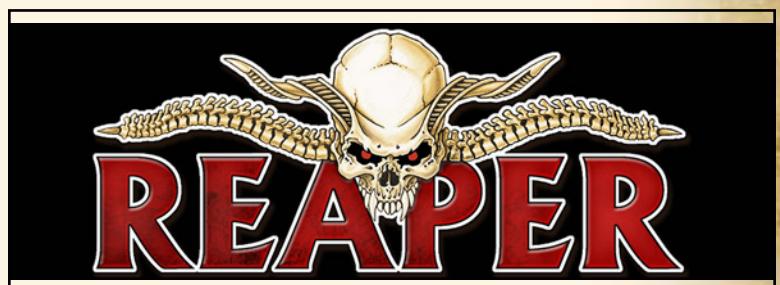
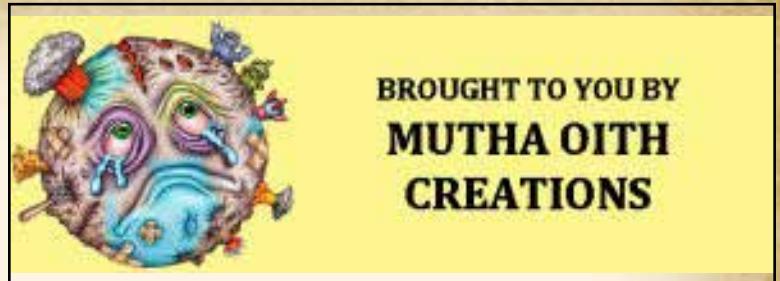
Randall Newnham is a mild-mannered tech support engineer by day and a gaming aficionado by night. He spends many evenings gaming with his wife, daughter and friends. He and his wife maintain an awesomely inspirational Game Shelf that houses their collection of board games and RPGs. You can check out their collection and other stories at Growing Up Gamers.

Links:

<http://growingupgamers.blogspot.com/>







Q&A WITH CHAOSIUM

Shannon McNamara interviews Mike Mason, Jeff Richard, and Michael O'Brien of Chaosium Inc.

McN: Chaosium has gone through some distinctive changes in the last few months. I feel it would be a disservice to completely ignore it in this interview so could you give us the details as to what happened, who Moon Design is and what they're excited about in regards to the future of Chaosium products?

C: In June this year, Greg Stafford and Sandy Petersen returned to active control of Chaosium, which Greg founded way back in 1975. At the time, Greg stated their immediate tasks were to:

- Quickly sift and sort through the current company problems
- Immediately ship the remaining Horror on the Orient Express backer rewards
- Focus on the Call of Cthulhu 7th edition Kickstarter backer rewards
- Return to regularly making awesome new games.

To assist in this, in July the principals of Moon Design Publications came on board at Chaosium, both as part-owners and as the new management team. Moon Design are Rick Meints (President of Chaosium), Neil Robinson (CFO), Jeff Richard (VP, Creative Director) and Michael O'Brien (VP, Product Development & Community Outreach). Greg and Sandy Greg Stafford remain as board members (Greg as chair of the board), and as creative consultants to Chaosium.



Mike Mason, Jeff Richard, & Michael O'Brien Interview by Shannon McNamara

Moon Design Publications is probably best known as the publisher of the critically acclaimed Guide to Glorantha, winner of the 2015 Diana Jones Award for Excellence in Gaming. It acquired the rights to Greg Stafford's legendary game setting Glorantha and the game systems RuneQuest and HeroQuest in 2013.

Going forward, with Moon Design now part of the Chaosium ownership, Chaosium once again becomes the licensed publisher for RuneQuest, HeroQuest and other products related to the Gloranthan universe, and will of course continue to publish Call of Cthulhu.

McN: Tell us about the Cult of Chaos. As I understand it, the Cult of Chaos existed at some early point but then went dormant for a time, yes? What prompted its return?

C: The Cult of Chaos <http://www.chaosium.com/gamemaster-program> is our Organized Play program for GMs, Keepers and Players of all our games. It has been a bit quiet in recent years, but we're arcing it up again on the launch of the Call of Cthulhu 7th edition with a massive OP campaign we hope people will run in FLGS, events, conventions, clubs and online.

McN: Great information. It might be an incentive for new GMs who have yet to run anything as well or GMs returning to the



hobby. We're all dying to hear more about 7th edition Call of Cthulhu. What new features does it bring for new and old gamers of the tabletop game?

C: The rules have been reworked from the ground up to make this edition easier to understand and navigate for new players, while providing veteran players with an easy to reference rulebook filled with cool ideas. Using the foundations of Chaosium's BRP system, we've further developed the rules to build upon the

themes in Lovecraft's stories while also enhancing the tension and excitement you get from playing a horror game. One of our key principles for the new edition was for it to remain compatible with the wide range of Call of Cthulhu scenarios and campaigns. We've introduced new chase rules so you can create exciting pursuit scenes like the one from Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth". Combat has also been streamlined using opposed skill rolls and new mechanics for fighting maneuvers. Also, there's new guidance on handling the effects of character insanity, Insane Delusions, and Bouts of Madness.

McN: One mechanic I hear a lot of positive things about is "pushing". Could you all elaborate on that for us?

C: The new Push mechanic provides an option for players to overcome failed skill rolls but only at the cost of upping the tension and potentially dropping them deeper into trouble. For example, an investigator fails a climb roll—this may mean that they started to climb but couldn't get a good purchase and so dropped back



down. If they elect to push the roll, they must justify why they should have another attempt. In this case, the player says that their investigator is going to take a running jump, throw themselves up the wall, and scramble up, throwing all caution to the wind. They have upped the stakes and put themselves at greater risk and so the Keeper agrees to the roll.

Before the pushed roll is made the Keeper can foreshadow the possible consequences for failing the toll—which will be worse than for an initial skill roll—saying that if the pushed roll is failed the investigator is going to fall and probably get injured (or, the Keeper could just ominously say “you’ll see,” and plans that a cultist spots the climber and then tips off their associates who go to greet the investigator as they reach the top). Pushing rolls is about increasing the tension and driving the story forward.

McN: Good information. Thank you. I feel obliged to also ask on the status of 7th edition Call of Cthulhu. When is the estimated time of release for the hard copies?

C: We’re working hard to get the hard copies out into distribution by the end of this year (2015). Rick is making sure the Kickstarter backers are being kept well informed with regular updates as to progress.

McN: The recent Kickstarters for Horror on the Orient Express have had some issues especially with international pledgers getting their hard copy products. Could you give everyone an idea of how this came to pass as well as what is being done to handle it? I heard that Moon Design is going to cover the international costs out of pocket. Is this true?

C: Yes, as we informed the CoC7 Kickstarter backers in a recent update, “to save Chaosium, the company we love and grew up with”, Moon Design Publications is actually providing the money out of their own personal pockets to both produce and ship the backer rewards for HotOE and CoC7. Numerous other debts

Chaosium incurred to writers, editors, and artists are also being settled this way.

We're happy to report we've now all but finished delivering on HotOE to backers everywhere, and the new management team's number one priority is fulfilling the CoC7 Kickstarter.

McN: Enough about the KS setbacks. I'm curious to hear about what future products are in the works and what you're excited about for the future of Moon Design/Chaosium.

C: Chaosium has always set a high benchmark for artistry and imagination, and this is something we will all strive to continue.

We have a great line of Call of Cthulhu books to follow the release of 7th edition. Doors to Darkness is a book of scenarios aimed at beginning Keepers and players, and Pulp Cthulhu is a supplement covering everything you need to adapt Call of Cthulhu for pulp style play (like that in the classic "Masks of Nyarlathotep") and comes with a range of new scenarios in that vein. A little further off we two new campaigns, one for Pulp Cthulhu called the Two Headed Serpent, and a Cthulhu by Gaslight Campaign called The Curse of Seven.

We're also revisiting Lovecraft Country and redeveloping some of the classic 1920s supplements like HP Lovecraft's Arkham and Escape From Innsmouth. It's a very exciting time for Call of Cthulhu!

We also have exciting releases coming up in our RPG lines set in Greg Stafford's mythic world of Glorantha. Following on from our 2015 Diana Jones Award winning Guide to Glorantha, we'll soon be releasing The Coming Storm, the first book in a three-part epic



HeroQuest campaign. Next year we will also be releasing 13th Age in Glorantha, bringing the award-winning 13th Age rules to the setting. Last, but certainly not least, next year we will return Chaosium to its roots with a new edition of RuneQuest, now returned firmly to the Glorantha setting.

Chaosium's first-ever product, way back in 1975, was a board game, and we're also relaunching our board games line. Next year we'll be producing an all-new edition of Credo, the Game of Dueling Dogmas. And a few weeks ago at Essen Spiel (the huge German gaming fair), we also announced we are partnering with Reiner Knizia, one of the world's most successful and well-known game designers, to bring out two board games in 2016. One of these will be set in Glorantha.

McN: In closing here's a question I always like to ask. What is it about tabletop RPGs that makes you passionate enough to keep creating scenarios and products for it as well as continuing to play in the venue when there are other options?

C: Tabletop RPGs are a wonderful art form – through RPGs, writers, game masters, and players all can entertain themselves at the same time as collectively exploring their unconscious imagination – be it the lurking nightmares of Call of Cthulhu or the mythic archetypes of Glorantha. Unlike computer games, novels, comic books, or film, tabletop RPGs are truly interactive and collaborative – everyone involved from the writer to the player contributes to the game as played. Suspense, adventure, plot twists, comedy, and drama are present in every tabletop RPG session and every time a scenario is run it is different! How can someone not be passionate about such a medium!

Storyteller Shannon MacNamara is your everyman. He can be a writer, a gamer, a designer, or an artist. He's making the rounds, attending and exploring Gaming Conventions. Shannon writes a review about his Con escapades, tales about his gaming adventures, and whatnots on his StoryTellers blog.

Links:

<http://storytellersjem.blogspot.com/>

The Gaming Life, playas ;)

by

Storyteller
Shannon Mac

Here there be Monsters



Aethercon Nov 13-15 2015



***Land of Suarst,
Jarl of all
Frost Giants***



***Lair of Perlexyffer,
the Green Dragon***



***Tower of
Icoludaen,
the Black***



***Hideout of
Harlyndra,
the Bandit Queen***



***Lair of Ushulu,
the Giant
Snapping Turtle***



***Lair of Julveltheaar,
the Blue Dragon***



***Lair of Balelseuvyx,
the Black Dragon***



***Range of Kruzog's
Orc Legions of
the Crooked Fang***



***Faldersha, Master
of Shambling Mounds***



***Keep of Lurxog,
the Troll Lord***

Here There Be Monsters Key

Q&A WITH FIRST ONES ENTERTAINMENT

Brian Fitzpatrick interviewed JP Chapleau of First Ones Entertainment for AetherCon IV

BF: You have launched your own RPG company now - First Ones Entertainment. Can you tell us a little bit about what F.O.E. is all about?

PC: F.O.E. started while I was working for LPJ Design running the NeoExodus Legacies campaign. I created FOE as a means to push out adventures and supplements for the campaign. We came to an agreement and FOE took over the Legacies campaign. From there, it grew on me.

BF: What has been the biggest challenge with running your own company vs. contributing to the efforts of another publisher?

JPC: You mean other than having to deal with artists, writers, doing layout, editing, GMing and writing most of the material? (laughs) Seriously, the biggest change I was was that I could no longer only focus on writing and GMing. I had to learn some design and other skills. I mean, from *In Sickness and in health* which was the first product I added to RPGNow/DriveThru to the latest Legacies adventure, there is a world of difference. A lot more art, a nicer look, crisper writing and editing. That said, it has been exciting to say the least.

BF: It looks like the Tyrants of Saggakar has taken

**JP Chapleau
Interview by
Brian Fitzpatrick**

on quite a life of its own of late!

What's your setting all about vs what you set in motion with NeoExodus?

JPC: First off, the bad guys are in charge, they created and rigged the system in their favor. They enslave almost everyone else, but give the glimmer of a hope of freedom. Those who are "free" are constantly forced to pay taxes, dues, fees, tariffs, making their lives a constant struggle for money. The world is surrounded by a wall of fog where people emerge remembering nothing: no place, no person, no event from beyond the Mists. People coming in forget their old allegiance, and make new one. This is a great plot device because it allows me to remake alliances on both sides of the Mists. The original inspiration comes from a deep fear of mine: my grandfather died with Alzheimer's disease. One thing I am trying out with Saggakar is to develop the world through our Organized Play campaign. This means that we focus only on one nation: the ArchDespotate of Faremh, which is a very cosmopolitan nation where people arrive frequently, leading to a melting pot of cultures and influences, think of the nation as a cross-road of the world if you wish. With the campaign growing, we will branch out into other regions. While I have an overview and some notes on the many nations, most of them exist as very short write-ups. Adventures and products hint at these, but as yet do not use them as a backdrop. Since Saggakar is new for everyone, I want



people to learn to love and hate elements of the setting. This year, I can call the campaign “international” as we will have games running in Canada, the US and the UK. For full details, check out www.FoeLegacies.com.

BF: How do you manage to be so productive with all your game materials while being a functioning adult and family man? What's your secret?

JPC: An understanding wife. Seriously. There are times when I do a lot of writing, then a lot of editing, then paint miniatures for a change. When I tire of one, I move to the other and so on. And I go from writing adventures to fluff to rules or campaign ideas, so even with one category I will do a number of things. For the kids, I make a point of stopping and spending time with them. Now that they are growing up, we now travel with our own table. This gives my wife some time to herself (which she doesn't mind). For the wife? I bribe her with restaurants and nights out (with or without the kids), in return for game time. It's a tough job but one I like doing.

BF: What board or roleplaying games are you playing with your family these days? Anything fun?

JPC: The kids and I mostly play Pathfinder together on the weekends. We belong to the two groups in Nashville. I will tell you there is nothing as exciting and scary as a little girl screaming “POWER ATTACK!!!” We also play Heroclix (basic version) to help the kids with their math as a family. I enjoy it because it is easy and fun. The kids also take part whenever I come up with a new game (a few died before ever being published).

BF: Anything exciting on the horizon you can talk about for F.O.E.?

JPC: The big thing is the upcoming release of our *Tyrants of Saggakar Player's Guide* for the Pathfinder RPG. This is a very big step for F.O.E., and one I am definitely looking forward to completing. Next will be getting in in physical print... I am giddy with excitement at that idea... I have a lot of other projects for F.O.E. in the new year. First off, we will keep building new adventure to our Legacies campaign, and expanding the Tyrants of Saggakar setting. Next, I have been talking to someone about doing some sci-fi material, which may be under the FOE imprint or another.

BF: What do you have planned for AetherCon this year? Anything your fans can look forward to?

JPC: Absolutely. I will be GMing three new adventures, and tally their critical event summary. Meaning that those players who attend Legacies games at Aethercon will be counted for the future of the world. Since the Legacies campaign is written in a way that players have choices, these choices matter. Therefore those who will participate get to change the world! The adventures are ToS1-04 *House of Mirrors* by James P. McTeague which is a murder mystery. ToS1-05 *Path to Ambition* by Randy Price which is an investigation/dungeoncrawl and ToS1-06 *And Everything Nice* by myself which is an outdoor exploration/investigation. A lot of variety in the style and scope of these adventures, but they are quite exciting and unique.

BF: If there is one question you always wanted to be asked but hadn't been yet - what would it be? And what is the answer?

JPC: It would be “Why do you do all this?” Which would be that I would like someone else to do the work for me. I write material *I* would like to be given to play in. The material for FOE is the stuff I would love to play and discover with the players - and to a certain extent I do. I love sharing the experience with the players, I would love to be involved in something like it.

Brian “Fitz” Fitzpatrick is a Writer and Game Designer who is constantly trying to avoid a gruesome death by low-flying soccer ball. Though he spends his days as a code monkey, he lives for the time he spends with his family, gaming or thinking about gaming throughout the week. He's constantly adding to his Big Book of Little Spaces and owns the websites Game Knight Reviews and Moebius Adventures where he keeps all his writing projects.

Links:

<http://www.gameknightreviews.com/>
<http://blog2.moebiusadventures.com/>



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Q&A WITH FASA

**Josh Harrison
Interview by
John McNabb**

*John McNabb interviews Josh Harrison of
FASA Games for AetherCon IV*

McN: Tell me about yourself. How long have you been a gamer, and what kinds of games do you like?

JH: I'm 40 years old, and live in Bangor, Maine with my wife, 2 kids, 3 cats, and 2 housemates. I've been gaming since I was about 8 or 9 years old, when I was introduced to the hobby through the classic "Red Box" Mentzer edition of Dungeons and Dragons. I like games that have a rich setting or interesting premise. In the debate between "crunchy" and "rules lite" I don't really have a position. As long as the system does its job in helping realize the game world I'm happy. *Earthdawn*, for example, is a pretty crunchy system, but I'm also a fan of the system used in *Unknown Armies*, and have started to delve into FATE.

McN: What drove you to work with FASA Games? And what have you learned from doing so?

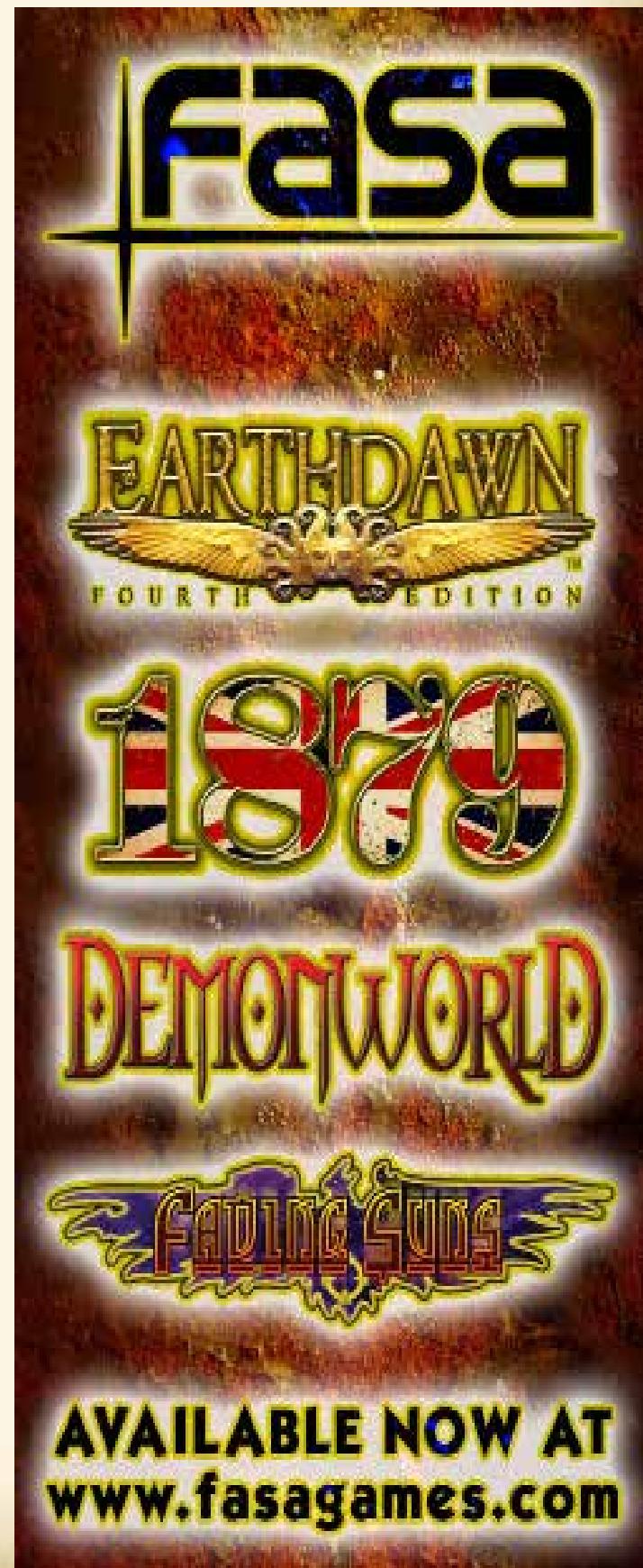
JH: FASA Games is a full subsidiary of FASA Corp, which has existed for a couple decades (though largely dormant for the last 15 years or so). When RedBrick shut down, FASA Games was created to take over the publication of *Earthdawn* and the other game lines held by or licensed to FASA. I kind of stumbled into the position of developer for *Earthdawn*, largely through my long history as a fan and occasional writer for the line. I've learned that developing and heading up a game line is hard work, and there are lots of people out there who are all too happy to let you know what you're doing wrong.

McN: Tell me about the Your favorite game from FASA?

JH: *Earthdawn* is my favorite game from FASA. Of course, I'm somewhat biased. There are a couple things I think it has always done well. First, the game system itself scales pretty nicely. d20-style games tend to have a particular statistical "sweet spot" -- if your bonuses and such are too low, the randomness dominates which can make things "swingy." Adjustments too high, they can overshadow the randomness of the dice. Dice pool systems (like Shadowrun or World of Darkness) can get around that, but the need to roll multiple dice can get unwieldy. The Step System (used in *Earthdawn*) strikes a nice balance.

McN: What makes it unique? What does it do that other systems do not?

JH: The setting is fantastic. I like some of the tropes of D&D style fantasy gaming -- it's what I grew up on, after all -- but they can come across as a bit silly. *Earthdawn* takes many of those tropes and built a setting around them. It's not quite so revolutionary now, but back in the mid-90s



when it premiered it was a breath of fresh air.

McN: What is the one thing in the Earthdawn setting that to you is the identifier, the thing that says ‘This is Earthdawn and nothing else?’

JH: I have to pick just one? Troll raiders dropping on an unsuspecting caravan from the air, wielding crystal weapons.

McN: Is there anything you feel that could be added to the Earthdawn setting (or anything that you might be planning on adding) that would enhance the setting even more?

JH: I am most excited about the upcoming *Questors Sourcebook*, which will explore and enhance the role of those who devote their lives to the Passions. That hasn't been done before, and it has been needed.

McN: What is currently in the works, and what does the future have in store for FASA in general?

JH: Right now we have the two core books (Player's and Gamemaster's) and the GM Screen out for Earthdawn. Next up is the *Travar Sourcebook*, which describes one of the setting's major cities and the area around it. Three more books -- the *Earthdawn Companion*, *Elven Nations Sourcebook*, and the *Questors Sourcebook* -- are in the pipe. We also have a couple of new RPGs. *1879* is a Victorian-era game with pulp and steampunk influences. A mad scientist opened a portal/wormhole to another world -- one with magic -- and that has brought magic back to Earth. It's sort of like if the Awakening from Shadowrun happened at the peak of the British Empire instead of the early 21st century. The first books for that are just being released, and there's a tabletop miniatures game that accompanies it.

Fading Suns is the other line we have. *Criticorum Discord*, a sourcebook, was released earlier this year, and we hope to see a relaunch of *Noble Armada*, the tabletop game, in the next few months as well.

FASA

FASA WAS A WELL KNOWN NAME IN GAMING, LAUNCHING CLASSIC LINES LIKE BATTLETECH, SHADOWRUN, AND EARTHDAWN. WHILE THE ORIGINAL WRITERS AND DEVELOPERS MOVED ON, THE COMPANY STILL EXISTS, THOUGH HAS SPENT THE LAST DECADE MANAGING AND LICENSING IP RATHER THAN PUBLISHING.

BUT ALL THAT HAS CHANGED. FASA GAMES IS A WHOLLY-OWNED SUBSIDIARY OF FASA CORP. A NEW TEAM OF WRITERS AND DEVELOPERS, LED BY FASA CO-FOUNDER ROSS BABCOCK, ARE RETURNING TO THE MARKET WITH A COUPLE OF CLASSIC LINES AND A COUPLE NEW ONES.

FOR THE OLD, EARTHDAWN IS THE FLAGSHIP LINE - NOW IN ITS FOURTH EDITION - AND FADING SUNS BRINGS SPACE FANTASY TO THE MIX. FOR THE NEW, 1879 BRINGS A MIX OF MAGIC-FLAVORED PULP AND STEAMPUNK TO VICTORIA'S BRITAIN, AND DEMONWORLD EXPLORES A WORLD UNDER SIEGE BY EVIL FORCES, AND THE EFFORTS TO DRIVE THEM BACK.

John R. L. McNabb is the brains and blisters behind McNabb Games whose signature product is the Morgalad Fantasy RPG. An ordained minister, he is a flamboyant eccentric with a passion for theater, and has an intense addiction to renaissance fairs, but also takes pleasure in the simple aspects of life like meditating during sunset with close friends or walking quietly alone through the woods on foggy mornings.



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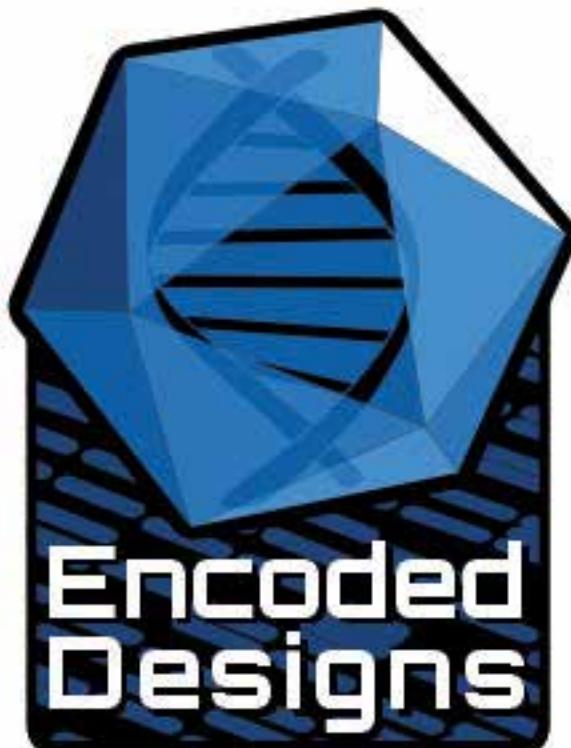
Q&A WITH ENCODED DESIGNS

Shannon McNamara interviews Phil Vecchione, Founder of Encoded Designs for AetherCon IV

In 2009, Phil along with the other writers from Gnome Stew produced their first book for Engine Publishing. Since then Phil has continued writing for both Gnome Stew and Engine Publishing. During that time he has won several ENnies, and has been nominated for two Golden Geek awards, and an Origins Award. In 2013 he entered the freelance market writing for both Evil Beagle Games and Third Eye Games. A trained project manager, Phil has managed many of Engine Publishing's larger publications. He is also the project manager for the Queen City Conquest gaming convention in Buffalo, NY. When he is not gaming and managing projects he is a husband, a father of two, and still a GM.

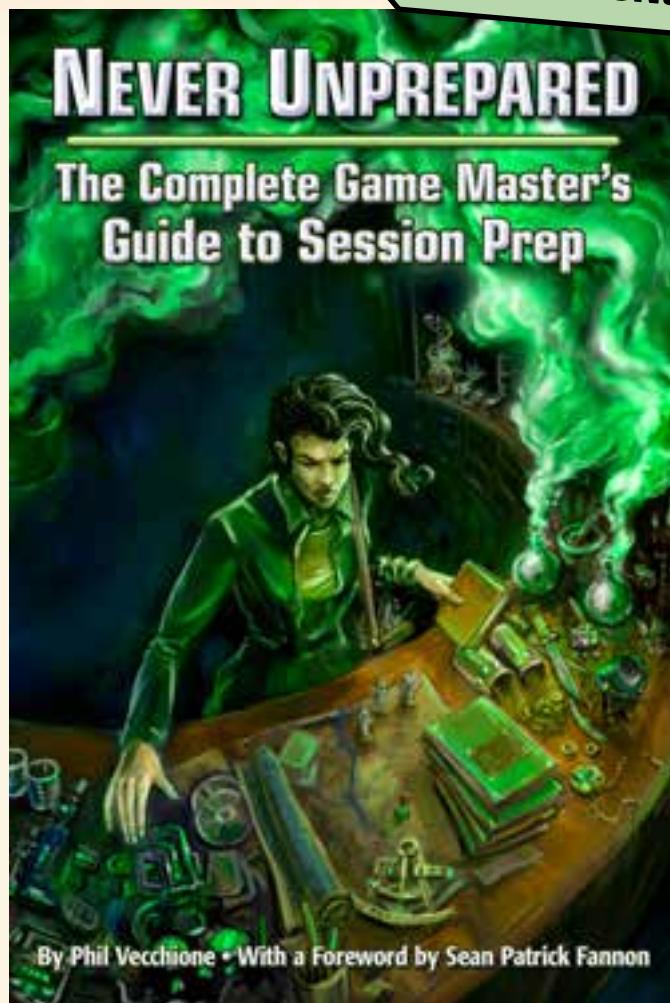
McN: First off, I have to announce I am a huge fan of your ebook "Never Unprepared: The Game Master's Guide To Session Prep". What prompted you to write it and how was it received?

PV: The ideas in Never Unprepared came out of my own needs to both speed up and simplify my prep, as my life began to get more complicated. Not wanting to game less, but realizing that my prep for games was taking a considerable amount of time, I began to look at how to hack my prep, to make it happen faster, and eventually streamlining it to remove the things that were no longer needed. I was pretty nervous about how Never Unprepared would be received. As it turned out, it was well received, with a number of positive interviews, as well as several award nominations, including an Origins Award. Just this year, Never Unprepared has



EncodedDesigns.com
[f / EncodedDesigns](https://www.facebook.com/EncodedDesigns)

Phil Vecchione
Interview by
Shannon McNamara



been translated into Portuguese, for distribution in Brazil.

McN: I'm always curious how people who end up designing tabletop games got into tabletop gaming. What's your story?

PV: I was very much a product of the 80's, learning Basic D&D from a family friend. I was too young to hang with the older kids, but my friend taught me the game, and ran a side campaign for me. After I started playing, I was hooked. I went very quickly from D&D to trying other games: Top Secret, Boot Hill, Star Frontiers, Gangbusters, Marvel Super Heroes, etc.

McN: What was your favorite tabletop RPG back in those days and why?

PV: I have always been pretty system promiscuous back in those days, it took me into the late 80's to settle into a favorite system. I got into Palladium through TMNT, but later I enjoyed the system, and I liked the idea of knowing a core system and being able to play in different worlds.

McN: You have some interesting products as well as some future ones in the works. Tell us about the ones you feel are the most inspiring.

PV: Our most recent project is called Character Cache. Encoded Designs has teamed up with artist, Matt Morrow, to produce NPC's for RPGs. Matt provides a professional illustration, and Encoded provides a write up that provides plot hooks and ideas

for how to incorporate the NPC into their campaign. We also have a section of questions for a player who might want to use the illustration for their character. We have reached the first milestone, and are now including a stat block with each illustration. The system used is selected by our Patrons, <https://www.patreon.com/encodeddesigns?ty=h> each month. As the campaign grows the quality of the artwork improves, and the number of stat blocks increases.

McN: What are some future ideas in the work for your company?

PV: We have a few projects in the works at this time. This past year we partnered with Third Eye Games to create the Fate conversion of their Part-Time Gods game. That lead to a successful Kickstarter, which resulted in the stretch goals of converting the other two books in the Part-Time Gods of Fate line: Divine Instruments and Minions of the Source. Both games add additional options for both characters and game masters alike. Also upcoming the Airy Peaks playset embraces the “draw maps, leave blanks” philosophy of Dungeon World by giving you a playground of caves, monsters, and options to build your own version of the Airy Peaks. Cybertek is a Cyberpunk toolkit for Fate Core, inspired by the Gibson Sprawl Trilogy. It will provide a framework for telling Cyberpunk stories, while allowing you to define your own dystopian cyberpunk world. It includes rules for cybernetics, cyberspace, and gear.

McN: Those all sound wonderful. Do we have a ballpark figure for when they will be released?

PV: The manuscripts for Minions of the Source and Divine Instruments will be turned over to Third Eye Games by the end of the year, and then they will need to laid out and published. My guess would be early 2016. Airy Peaks we hope to have the initial manuscript done by the end of the year. Our hopes would be to have a Kickstarter going in the Summer, with hopes of publishing by the end of the year. With Cybertek, the goal is to have an Alpha set of rules written by the end of the year, that can go into an open playtest. Based on the playtest feedback, we will continue to develop the rules. At best, I think it would be end of 2016 or early 2017.

McN: What is it about tabletop RPGs that makes you passionate enough to keep creating scenarios and products for it as well as continuing to play in the venue when there are other options?

PV: I don't think there is any form of entertainment like tabletop RPG's. It is a unique medium where we are both participant and spectator. There is no other form of entertainment that is as satisfying for me, then to share a table with others and create something collaboratively. I not only want to keep creating for this hobby for my own selfish reasons, but I want to empower others to have their own unique experiences and to enjoy this hobby as much as I have all these years.



Storyteller Shannon MacNamara is your everyman. He can be a writer, a gamer, a designer, or an artist. He's making the rounds, attending and exploring Gaming Conventions. Shannon writes a review about his Con escapades, tales about his gaming adventures, and whatnots on his StoryTellers blog.

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The Gaming Life, playas ;)
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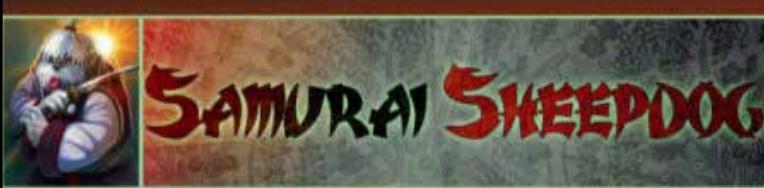
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POST WORLD GAMES



Q&A WITH DROP DEAD STUDIOS

Micah Holmes interviews Adam Meyers for AetherCon IV

MH: What can Gamers new to your site expect your RPG materials to focus on?

AM: Extensive rules rewrites. We chucked out the entire Vancian tradition when we wrote Spheres of Power, and our latest project Skybourne has so far rewritten multiple skills, the vehicle rules, the siege engine rules, and added multiple new systems for magic, mass combat, etc. I've come to accept its just what I do, and virtually everything I touch I end up trying to change something.

MH: Any new projects planned beyond those displayed at DropDeadStudios.com?

AM: We just started a series of handbooks to expand the Spheres of Power system (funded via Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/DropDeadStudios?ty=h>), and of course we're working on the Skybourne campaign setting.

MH: Can we expect to find any of your products featured in one or more Aethercon events?

AM: Well I'm running a Skybourne game and I think there's several copies of Spheres of Power being offered in various contests and bundles. Other than that, this is my first time at Aethercon and I'm going to be looking around

(virtually speaking) same as everyone else.

MH: I see you have 8 Pathfinder Class Supplements available for sale; what should those unfamiliar to your offerings expect these to provide?

AM: Rogue Glory was the very first thing we ever did, and while it may not be as pretty as our later stuff, I will stand by its mechanics forever. It's a pre-Unchained update to the Rogue including new powers, new archetypes, new feats, a re-write of the Stealth rules (notice a pattern here?), a rewrite of the trap rules, etc. The rest of our classes were written in a bundle, each one built around something we thought the game was lacking at the time. Most of those were written during the time I was trying to master the different mechanical aspects of Pathfinder, and each one does something different to accomplish that. I'm actually thinking of revisiting them in the future, maybe cleaning them up a bit more with hindsight and releasing them as an "Adventurers of Skybourne" hardcover book.

MH: Do you believe your supplements can be cross-compatible or have reasonable scalability with other rulesets apart from Pathfinder?

AM: I haven't tried to create a 5th ed version of our rules

The advertisement features the logo "DROP DEAD STUDIOS" with a stylized green dragon icon. Below the logo is a blurb: "Spheres of Power: A new magic system for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, featuring new classes, concepts, adventures, and an ever-expanding array of handbooks!" To the left, there are images of several books from the "Spheres of Power" series, including "Spheres of Power", "Spheres of Power: Mage Guide", and "Spheres of Power: Warlock". In the center, a woman in a blue robe stands next to a large, glowing, yellowish-green energy sphere. To the right, there is a collage of images related to the "Skybourne" campaign setting, including a map of "The City Andrus", a red-haired woman, a large multi-headed dragon, a man in a green outfit, and a circular emblem for "M-Quarantine". At the bottom, a banner reads "Expanded support now on Patreon!"

Spheres of Power: A new magic system for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, featuring new classes, concepts, adventures, and an ever-expanding array of handbooks!

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Adam Meyers
Interview by
Micah Holmes

yet, but I know several people who have been working on the conversion in their spare time. I can't make any claims about whether or not it would work outside the F20 tradition, but one of the whole design goals of the system was to allow people to adapt magic to fit their needs rather than forcing them to adapt their needs to fit the magic system, so my slightly-arrogant side wants to say sure, it should work pretty well with a lot of other games, but that certainly hasn't been tested.

MH: Do you plan to focus solely on Pathfinder supplements, or plan to delve into other rulesets in the future?

AM: That's an interesting question, and one that's kind of hard to answer. At this time we have so many Pathfinder books in the works that I don't really have the opportunity to look at other rules sets and plan

products or develop conversions. Will that change in the future though? Who knows? I certainly like other rules sets and there's some that I don't see getting nearly enough love with everyone focused on the current Pathfinder vs 5th ed. debate, so I'd love to expand out if I got the chance.

MH: Will you be considering in the future any theme items to supplement games such as dice, cards, or figurines?

AM: You hit something that we're already working on: Spheres of Power is extensive and Skybourne does so many things with airships and large-scale crew battles that we're looking into custom troop icons and airship minis to help people make the most of them. I can't say when that will happen exactly, but it is something we've got in the works.

MH: Do you have a particular moment of satisfaction with your influence on the Role-Playing community?

AM: Probably my first time getting a 5-star review. Endgeist, that fabled god among Pathfinder reviewers, gave Rogue Glory 5 stars and his stamp of approval, and that was one of the big moments where I realized this was something I could really do. I've got a few more books out, but it still makes me unbelievably happy when I stumble upon people talking about my books in a forum

somewhere.

MH: Do you have advice for new writers & creators looking to break out into the market?

AM: There are two sure-fire ways to bend the ear of any publisher. One: Find us at a convention and buy us lunch. Two: Have a finished manuscript for an awesome product. If you put both together, you're that much more golden. Write. Write every day. Too often people discuss how they want to be a writer, designer, or do something else creative, but they aren't spending their time learning the craft so they can do it.

MH: Do you have any advice for those looking to submit material to you (or any other outlet)?

AM: I love collaboration. If you send me anything, expect it to be sent back with a lot of proverbial red ink, not because it's bad, but because I want to make it better, and feel free to tell me if you don't agree. Nothing ever is as good alone as it can be with multiple eyes on it, and I love it when I publish something knowing it's as good as it can get. As for other outlets, the same applies; don't be afraid of criticism. This industry is built on the fact that everyone games differently, and every opinion, no matter how much you disagree with it, is a chance to learn how someone else sees the game.

Micah Holmes is a published author and illustrator. He wrote the fantastic "Tyme And Yon Serpent (Serpent's Tail Book 1)" & is working his magic on the upcoming gem "Once Upon Tun'Rumma".

He is a full time loving husband and father and spends the rest of his time working on his book or at his dayjob as Quality Control Inspector.

Links:

<http://www.amazon.com/Tyme-Serpent-Serpents-Tail-Book-ebook/dp/B004FPZ0BU>



The image shows the cover of a book titled "T.A.Y.S. ACT 1; BOOK 2: ONCE UPON TUN'RUMMAL. NOW AVAILABLE!!!". The cover features a portrait of the author, Micah Holmes, on the left. The title is written in a stylized, gothic font. Below the title, the URL "WWW.LULU.COM/SPOTLIGHT/GCALPHA911ATJUNODOTCOM" is displayed. To the right of the text is a colorful, abstract illustration of a cross or mandala-like shape in blue, yellow, and red.

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Q&A WITH ANTHROPOS GAMES

Brian Fitzpatrick interviews Calvin Johns of Anthropos Games for AetherCon IV

BF: How did Anthropos Games begin? How many folks are a part of your enclave of authors and designers?

CJ: In late 2008, I found myself at the University of Texas working in a physical anthropology computer lab--not my area of expertise, for the record--with a whole lot of time on my hands. During one of my shifts, I received an email from a “fan” who had apparently been playing *Early Dark*--the most solid game I had designed to date--for six years with his own friends after attending a few game nights with me in college. He asked if I’d “finished it yet” and when it would be for sale. The thought of selling one of my games had never crossed my mind. That very hour I decided on the name “Anthropos Games,” apropos of my chosen profession, and registered a website to start promoting *Early Dark*. The recent success of *Fantaji* has opened up the chance of making an honest man out of Anthropos Games.

BF: You mentioned when we spoke earlier that you’re an anthropologist by training. What insights has anthropology brought to the indie gaming scene?

CJ: Well, my training and experience as an anthropologist have been central to the design conceits of both *Early Dark* and *Fantaji*, but I can’t say I have really turned a concentrated

lens onto the gaming culture itself. My recently completed dissertation was about various forms of play--including tabletop RPGs--as moments of social poetics and cultural production. Other than the content and design of the games, I guess the moments that most clearly demonstrate the impact of academic anthropology on Anthropos Games come from my seven years of art directing.

BF: Everybody I’ve ever met who has been a gamer has that one story that they like to tell over and over to establish their gaming cred... What’s yours?

CJ: Oh, I don’t boast of any outstanding gamer cred. Much of my experience in the culture has been quite humbling. I’d say that a recent session at Gen Con was quite memorable. I was running a *Fantaji* game at a private party a few blocks from the Indiana Convention Center late Saturday night in which I hosted two indie studio CEOs, two of the most talented freelance designers in the industry, and two award-winning dungeon masters who both happen to be sought-after illustrators as well. Maybe the six most important figures I’ve ever GMed for. I guess if you say it like that it can work as a boast, but in reality it was a rather low-key night among friends.

BF: What can you tell me about your first game, *Early Dark*? You describe it as “very crunchy and heavy”

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that brings creativity to the fore. What's the secret to that approach and how has it been received by the community?

CJ: Big question! *Early Dark* is a crunchy system with a solid number of moving parts. Turns and combat will move fast for experienced players, but I would say there is a pretty significant learning curve, honestly. That is mostly because the game takes a different head-space than more traditional games. This can take new players, who come in thinking that *Early Dark* looks traditional enough, by surprise. I think it can be hard to tell what the general consensus on a game is nowadays. So many sales come through DriveThruRPG or similar sites, and you don't always get the feedback you do at conventions or during FLGS events.

BF: And now Anthropos is working on *Fantaji*, which you describe as a “qualitative universal engine.” What is the core idea behind *Fantaji*? What makes it something that we should look at using in place of our current batch of favorite rules systems?

CJ: *Fantaji* basically takes the central design conceit of *Early Dark* and drives it even farther from the mainstream. *Fantaji* is rather decidedly a “story game,” but it focuses on narrative in a different way. Most story games use rather traditional mechanics but focus on building a good story by featuring a narrative-resolution process instead of a combat-resolution process. In contrast, *Fantaji* uses narrative elements as the objective “moving parts” of the mechanic. Themes, obstacles, and environmental details all factor into the conflict-resolution mechanic itself. The players can focus on overcoming obstacles and role-playing. We like to that *Fantaji* doesn’t just reward role-playing, it is role-playing.

BF: How do you plan on supporting *Fantaji* moving forward? Once you’ve hooked your fans, what can they look forward to in the next year or two to feed their growing addiction?

CJ: First are the two adventure modules set in the Mázaki campaign setting and two “*Fantaji Realms*” booklets that offer a dozen new campaign settings for our players to explore. We also have a series of “*Fantaji Elements*” products scheduled. These will be short 20-30 page documents that unpack new mechanics or mods, offer new features, and demonstrate implications or possibilities that might go unseen by new players.

BF: What are you playing now? Any good stories you can share from your recent time at the table?

CJ: I have a long-distance *Early Dark* campaign that combines sessions around the table with emails and play-by-post moments, but most of my time is spent demoing *Fantaji* in one-shots and restarting campaigns with friends and testers whenever we have a new angle or setting we want to explore. I try to set up a dedicated No-Anthropos-Games-Night with some of my grad student friends, but that’s only once or twice a month or so.

BF: What three games would you take with you on that desert island we all hear that we might be stranded on someday?

CJ: Oh, I’m much more of a toy guy than a game guy. It might sound weird coming from a game designer—stick with me here—but I really don’t like prototypical games all that much. I much prefer toys, honestly. I’d define toys as instruments or objects that elicit new ideas, afford new uses, and inspire new games at a moment’s notice. I’d take a Frisbee first and foremost, a poker set (without any intention of playing poker with it), and a bag of dice. Was that cheating? Haha. Sorry, but I’m sticking with it.

Brian “Fitz” Fitzpatrick is a Writer and Game Designer who is constantly trying to avoid a gruesome death by low-flying soccer ball. Though he spends his days as a code monkey, he lives for the time he spends with his family, gaming or thinking about gaming throughout the week. He’s constantly adding to his Big Book of Little Spaces and owns the websites Game Knight Reviews and Moebius Adventures where he keeps all his writing projects.

Links:

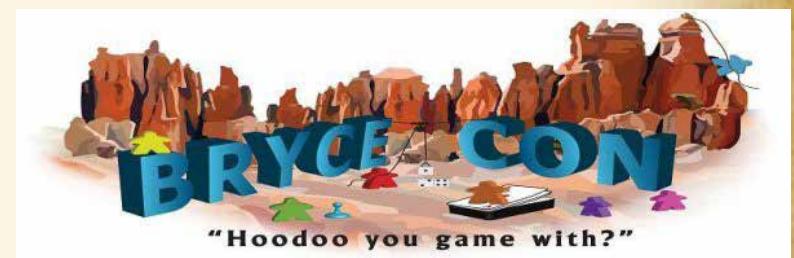
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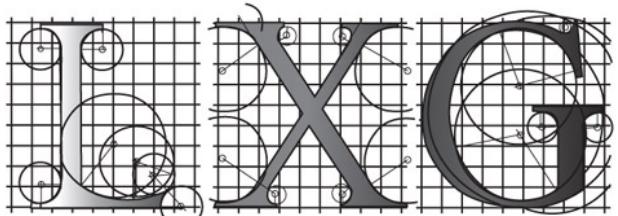
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Q&A WITH PINNACLE ENTERTAINMENT

Randall Newnham of *Growing up Gamers* interviews Matthew Cutter of Pinnacle Entertainment Group of AetherCon IV

RN: How long have you been a gamer, and what kinds of games do you like to play?

MC: I started gaming in 1982, with the D&D red box. I remember my mom had bought a copy of it for my uncle the previous Christmas—the family was always big into card and board games—but it didn’t catch on. I clearly remember her explaining, “It’s a game that never ends.” At 10 years old, the idea of a game that never had to end was incredibly appealing. Maybe that’s why childhood RPGs tended to be epic all-day-and-night stints. We were making the game’s figurative promise literal.

After that, I got my hands on Call of Cthulhu. Most of my formative RPG experiences were in 1920s New England rather than a fantasy milieu. These days my actual gaming is limited to board games and Wii with the kids. Sorry! is a fave. I haven’t had a steady RPG group in several years, but lately have been running Savage Worlds: The Last Parsec games for my son. We use Legos for figures. His imagination and enthusiasm are infectious; it’s rare for adults to secure a line back to the time when we’re all most creative.

RN: Tell me about Deadlands: Reloaded. What does Savage Worlds do for the setting that wasn’t there in previous incarnations?

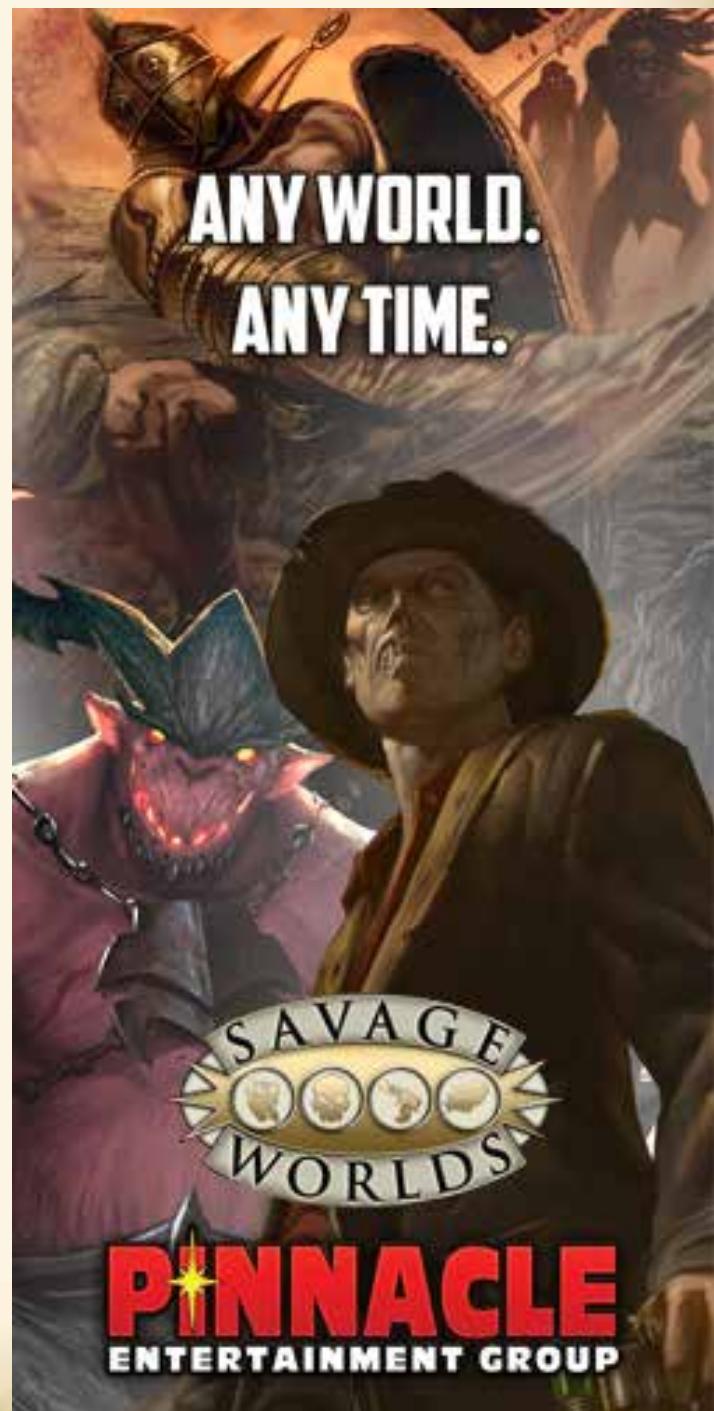
MC: For the setting itself? Not much! I’m joking ... a little. My goal with the Reloaded books has been to advance the Deadlands storyline by a few years, paying off the plots that were introduced in Classic. I’ve always joked that it’s a fantastic job because it requires thinking like a Classic Deadlands GM. That’s to say, the old style of our books was to present a ton of information—typically in a character’s “voice”—and the implication for the Marshal is, “OK, go make a campaign out of this.” I get to make the campaign, and then publish it, which is a great deal.

In the Plot Point Campaigns, I’m trying to find the crucial balance between telling the Deadlands story and making the heroes the center of events, while dovetailing everything into the overall storyline that runs through Deadlands Noir to Hell on Earth. It’s a challenge. Sometimes I do a better job than others. Aside from a few additions to the canon here and there,

Matthew Cutter
Interview by
Randall Newnham

I’m playing around in a setting that’s been rich and complex from the beginning. That’s thanks to Shane Hensley, John Goff, and all the designers whose books have helped me “make a campaign out of this.”

From a rules standpoint, Deadlands Reloaded streamlines and standardizes a game that was at times unwieldy. We lost some “flavor”—each character type no longer has its own rulebook—but I’m looking at



different ways to re-infuse some of that flavor into next year's printing of Deadlands. We'll be going to our new graphic novel format for that release, which rules. Very exciting. I'm trying to find the perfect balance between streamlined rules and books that sweat Weird West from every pore.

RN: Rippers seems like a novel idea. Can you tell me more about the game Rippers?

MC: Rippers Resurrected is a game of Gothic horror set in the Victorian era. The heroes are members of an ancient society—the Rippers—that does battle with the monsters of the Cabal. They get their name from the science of “rippertech,” which involves surgically removing body parts from defeated monsters and grafting them onto the heroes’ bodies. This has certain benefits and drawbacks (to sanity, usually), but it’s the equalizer that allows mere humans to stand up to vampires, mummies, undead fiends, and ravening demons. It’s “Gothic horror meets high adventure.”

Depending when you read this, our Rippers Resurrected Kickstarter may be in progress or just wrapping up. The game's been out of print for several years; this “Resurrected” edition presents characters, Savage Tales, creatures, and Setting Rules updated for use with Savage Worlds Deluxe. Best of all, the GM's book features an all-new Plot Point Campaign by Simon Lucas and Chris Dolunt, authors of the original Rippers. You'll be able to purchase the Rippers Resurrected Player's Guide, Game Master's Handbook, GM screen, 32-page adventure, and other goodies at <http://www.peginc.com> soon, so I'd ask all your readers to please check it out!

RN: What can we expect in the future from you and Pinnacle?

MC: Pinnacle has many irons in the fire! We have top

men and women working on the highly anticipated Savage Worlds version of Rifts. I'm not on those design teams, but what I've seen of their work so far has been stunningly great. The next big Weird West product on my desk is the fourth Plot Point Campaign, Deadlands: Good Intentions. This time around we're heading to Deseret and the City o' Gloom, giving the blessed some divine perks, bringing back Metal Mages and Augmented Scrappers, and telling the long-awaited story of Dr. Hellstromme's second trip to Hell. Readers will get the first taste of what life promises to be like in the Weird West “After the Cackler.” (Eerie laughter.)

I'm also working on the officially licensed RPG for Eric Powell's The Goon, which is just plain fun. I'm hoping to come up with a game that bottles the comic book's essence, and also acts as a desk reference to the people, places, and events recounted over the comic's run. If you haven't read it, I suggest you check it out with all due haste. Mr. Powell won all those Eisner awards for a reason!

And after that ... more games! There will always be more games.

Randall Newnham is a mild-mannered tech support engineer by day and a gaming aficionado by night. He spends many evenings gaming with his wife, daughter and friends. He and his wife maintain an awesomely inspirational Game Shelf that houses their collection of board games and RPGs. You can check out their collection and other stories at Growing Up Gamers.

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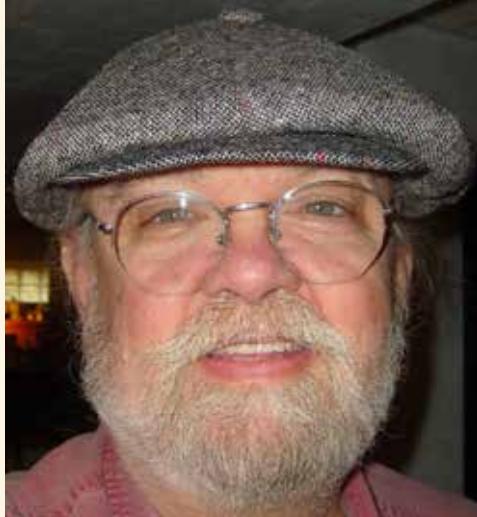
I was in college when I was first exposed to *D&D* at *GenCon* in '74. I took it back to my game club, Southern Illinois Strategic Games Society, and soon had an avid group of players that wanted to play every Sat. I was the only DM for the next 15 months for up to 15 players in a session, though it was most often 7-9.

To be an "official" University function, and to get a really sweet room in the Student Center every Saturday for free, we had to have a Faculty Advisor. Ours was a young-ish History professor whose name I have long forgotten. He was an OK guy, don't get me wrong, but it was a stipulation of his that Fall that led to the tale I am about to unfold for you. He came to me one day and requested that his son be allowed to come play once in a while; he assured me he was bright enough and had already expressed an interest in wargaming. Oddly enough, I no longer remember his son's name, either. I am certain that the reason is the friend that the Prof.'s son brought with him that first day for moral support.

Now I have to hand it to both of them, they did not lack for courage. They were probably about 14 or so, Middle School aged. The youngest guy in our club was 19, and the Oldest (Tom Wham) was about 28 and I was 25 (4 years in USN), the rest fell in between our kid and me. I am pretty sure I would have been a little intimidated; they were, but only a little. They took to *OD&D* (what I still write for and run) like goslings to a pond. They were certainly enthusiastic, and their minds were pretty damned sharp; they saw through several subterfuges and often came up with great ideas. They fell right into the whole experience like they had been doing it all their short lives.

Now it's time to tell you about Bob, the friend of the Prof.'s son. Bob was the single most unlucky player I have ever had the pleasure to have at my table. His rotten joss never had anything to do with anything he did, no action he took or any bad decision made. Bob was one of those poor souls who attracted disaster. Astonishingly, he never once got discouraged, never once complained.

The first time Bob died, he was minding his own business, eyes and ears alert, as the party explored their way down a corridor. Located in this corridor was an age-worn trap that might or might not work; 6 spears that sprang from the walls spread over about 9 feet. To make a long story short, the trap did work, but only one spear came out. You guessed it, Bob got skewered. 1st level PC's don't take skewering well. Time for a new character...



Next week, they were trekking outdoors investigating reports of giants having been seen in the area; not to confront them but to scout them out for someone that paid them to do it. The party was spotted by a giant above them as they walked single file along a ledge. The giant decided to chuck a rock at them; it had a low chance to actually hit something at that distance, but it did. To be fair I rolled a die and counted down the marching order; right again, Bob caught the 450 pound rock. 1st level PC's don't catch huge rocks well. Time to roll up another...

This went on for week after week. Amazingly, Bob never lost his fascination for the game. I started using an average die to give him a leg up every time to stay sort of close to the rest of the group in level. Fighter, magic-user or cleric, they all died.

We decided to take a break from the campaign (they had explored everything I had drawn—I needed some time), and decided to play *Boot Hill*. Everyone created their own characters and I required them to give me a little back story. We jumped in with both feet and were soon enjoying this new RPG and genre. About 10 or 11 were playing that day. The PC's ranged from the sheriff and deputy to a couple of gunfighters, a "tame" Native American and two greasy bandito types. We spent about 20 minutes setting the stage, who was where and all that. The game started and pretty soon the sheriff was trying to buffalo one of the gunfighters, the deputy had locked up one of the banditos and a card game was underway in the saloon while the still-free bandito is sitting in front of the saloon getting drunk. I had lots of NPC's in the scenario so not everyone knew who was playing what, who was "real" and who was an NPC.

About 2 hours into the game, it happened that a Native American on a mule ambled down the street past the saloon where the bandito was now three sheets to the wind. In his drunken haze he looks up, sees "an injun" and empties both barrels of his 8 Gauge shotgun, killing both the mule and the inoffensive "injun". The bandito was one of the PC's, and by now you have probably guessed the ID of the hapless Native American. Thus was "Deathless Bob" born, from the macerated corpse of yet another hapless PC. He was grinning, like he expected nothing less. When he asked me if he could/should roll up new PC, I lost it.

And that's my funniest gaming story ever.

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